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## **Eurostars and Eurocities: Towards a Sociology of Free Moving Professionals in Western Europe**

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# **Eurostars and Eurocities: Towards a Sociology of Free Moving Professionals in Western Europe**

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*Abstract.* Despite an economic union premised on free movement across Europe, population statistics consistently show that a very low percentage of Western Europeans migrate and settle permanently in other European countries. Middle class Europeans show a remarkable propensity to stay put in their native countries. One can only conclude that the European economic and social system functions in ways that scarcely resemble its founding principle of the free movement of peoples. This presentation reports on qualitative research in Brussels and Amsterdam which has sought to understand the choices, career trajectories, and personal problems faced by professionals who have chosen the path of free movement within Europe. The study reveals the deep-seated national organization of life in even the most internationalized-or Europeanized-of cities, particularly concerning housing, child education, and political participation. Favell focuses on the difficult struggle for "quality life" that is and always has given the advantage to a rooted "bourgeois" conception of accumulation and social power. In a Europe where the declining welfare state and the all-powerful international economic system would seem to be overwhelming the nation-state, Favell suggests that these hidden barriers to free movement in Europe lie at the heart of the resilience of the national as the dominant form of social organization on the continent.

## **1. Introduction**

This paper represents the first set of empirical results of a project designed to study the free movement of professionals within the European Union. Brussels is an obvious location in which to start, with its role as the putative capital of Europe and its very high resident population of foreign EU citizens. Yet in many ways it is an exceptional location. Although one of the core missions of the European Union has been to break down barriers to free movement in Europe, a surprisingly low number of Europeans move and permanently settle outside their country of origin, particularly when we compare the EU to free movement within the United States of America. I explore the hypothesis that we can understand this reluctance to move by considering the 'informal' barriers to integration experienced by European residents in their everyday life in foreign cities. I take a close look, therefore, at the experience of foreign EU residents in Brussels on the housing and labor market, as parents with children, in terms of welfare, medical services

and retirement, as political participants in local elections, and as consumers of particular services in the city. The research centers on 20 in-depth interviews with European residents of diverse backgrounds, along with background research on the policy response of the city-region and on the services provided by 'expat' oriented businesses in the city. The research in Brussels has been complemented by exploratory comparative work in the city of Amsterdam

The research also addresses a number of other key academic issues. It offers a novel approach to the study of globalization and Europeanization, by seeking to humanize - through intimate oral history and participant observation methods - many of the sweeping exaggerations made by sociologists and economic geographers of globalization. I take a skeptical look at just how possible it is to live out the ultra-mobile global or transnational family lives predicated for these people, who are wrongly classed as 'elites'. I offer evidence on the participation of foreign European residents in the gentrification of a typical post-industrial city in Europe. I also seek to operationalize categories and theories more familiar from the study of the integration of non-European 'ethnic minority' populations in Europe. Finally, the study offers a good deal of skeptical evidence about the reality of European citizenship and Europeanization in Europe.

I find that Brussels offers a relatively high access to 'quality of life' benefits for foreign residents. This openness is due to the exceptional combination of a cosmopolitan, multicultural bi-national nature, its European role, and its deregulated markets. As a case, it exposes some of the limitations of other seemingly open 'global' cities like Amsterdam and Paris. The report only offers inconclusive evidence on the explanation of the limited rates of free movement in Europe, but it does show in detail how complicated a long term foreign settlement is for committed free

movers, *even* in a city as open and easy to settle in as Brussels. I predict that a full scale study on the free movement of professionals in Europe will reveal just how deeply embedded are nationally-specific and locally-rooted forms of urban life in Europe, and that this is the underlying secret of the resilience of European nation-states in an age of apparent nation state decline and globalization.

## **2. Conceptual Issues**

The study of foreign resident professionals in Brussels is an excellent strategic research site for a number of key research questions taken from the current literature in various different disciplines and sub-fields. Here, I will outline the contours of these bigger questions underlying the study.

### **2.i. The puzzle of free movement in the EU**

Despite an economic union premised on free movement (of capital, services, goods *and* persons), and increasing kinds of mobility across Europe (retirement migration, student mobility, tourism, cross-border shopping and so forth), official population statistics have consistently reported that a very low percentage of West European migrate and settle permanently in other European countries (OECD-SOPEMI 2000: 31-32). This percentage is, with the exception of Belgium and Luxembourg, well under 5% in all countries, and well behind percentages of non-West European migrants. Amazingly, in highly ‘global’ internationalized countries such as the Netherlands (a country which regularly tops globalization indexes; see Kearney 2001), or Britain (home of London, the favourite ‘global city’ example in Europe; see Taylor 2000), the figure is under 1.5% (Eurostat 1997; Koslowski 1994, 2000; see Appendix 3). Working figures used in official statements by the cabinet of Commissioner Diamantopoulou, which is responsible for labor

mobility issues, suggest that each year only 0.4% of EU citizens move to another member state to work each year; this is compared to 2.4% in the USA. Discounting ongoing working class migration from the south, and growing retirement migration to the south, we are left with the fact that middle class Europeans show a remarkable propensity to stay put in their native countries. When put alongside the rates of internal economic mobility of persons in North America, one can only conclude that the European economic and social system – on the question of free movement of persons at the very least – must function in ways that scarcely resemble at all the free movement premises of its founding principles (on US mobility trends, see Fischer 2001).

Certain qualifications need to be made. International migration data – of the kind documented by the annual OECD-SOPEMI reports – is notoriously unreliable when measuring mobility that does not fit neatly into its definition of an act of international migration (more than one year official settled residence, plus de-registration of residency back home). Mobility and cross-border movement in Europe 2000 is surely much more significant than it was in the mid 1970s or 80s. But even allowing for this, there is an obvious puzzle here, given the economic incentives for movement. Much concern has been expressed in EU circles about the dangers of asymmetric shocks to national economies, particularly as a consequence of European Monetary Union (EMU): business will move to wherever it is most viable to locate, and people will follow the economic opportunities, stripping countries of human resources, or burdening others with new influxes. EU economists, meanwhile, assume this mechanism will come into effect, in order to model how an integrated Europe will deal with such shocks. Yet the figures apparently do not bear these assumptions out. Why is this?

Focusing on intra-EU migrants in cities would obviously change the picture: percentages will rise dramatically. We may then be able to speculate about transposing models of internal national migration to the EU scenario: of movement from periphery (provincial) regions to centre (international) cities, and the relation of this spatial mobility to social mobility (Watson 1964; Fielding 1995). Is there an 'escalator' phenomenon here, as there would be at national level? More importantly, is it an escalator for individuals to surpass what they would have achieved by staying at home?

The EU has, if nothing else, worked tirelessly to break down formal barriers to free movement of workers: both in terms of legal reform (on discriminatory practices, recognition of qualifications, access to benefits) and in terms of 'citizen' information and advice services (Siegel 1999). Obvious practical targets that remain are the monopolistic national organisation of certain professions, and the non-transferability of retirement funds around national welfare state systems. But we might easily hypothesise any number of 'hidden' or 'informal' barriers to successful free movement at a social or cultural level. Even the most casual traveller around Europe quickly understands that the continent remains a babel of national cultures, which demands of any European an extraordinarily high level of nationally specific 'know how' or 'local knowledge' to feel comfortable living and working outside their country of origin. Could this be the underlying reason for the lack of intra-European migration? When combined with the probability of formidable professional barriers, there is a strong case for focusing study here.

Yet Brussels, on the face of it, presents itself as a dramatic counter example to this general reluctance to move. Its high population of resident professional Europeans (which accounts for

between 10 and 15% of the total city population) suggests that if successful free movement is not possible here then where could be it possible? Studying what makes Brussels special – perhaps in comparison with other similarly open, international cities – may enable spelling out the conditions of a genuine free movement, while understanding better its ‘hidden’ limitations. This approach leads the focus of the study away from ‘eurocrats’ as such. *Fonctionnaires*, who have mainly been recruited as a group through national *concours* and now have jobs for life, are not good examples of free movers, who typically made individual decisions to migrate for professional reasons, and whose positions are often unfixed and unpredictable in nature. It also leads the study away from the already well-studied example of highly structured international mobility within multinational corporations: the people usually referred to by the term ‘expats’. Here, again, such employees are usually treated as a group whose mobility is usually built in structurally to their careers within the company, often on short rotations from one country to another. The structures provide by working within international organisations and corporations are thus in a sense structures which shelter these employees from the true conditions and choices of free movement; they are less interesting for this present study. I do include such people (*fonctionnaires*, career expats) within my sample, but they are peripheral to my focus of attention.

The real focus, then, will be to understand the choices, career trajectories and personal problems faced by professionals who have individually chosen the path of individual free movement within Europe. To understand constraints on movement, it is necessary to understand the various issues they face in recreating a ‘normal’ pattern of professional and domestic life as a

consequence of moving to work in the foreign city. But there are likely to be significant benefits as well costs.

## **2.ii. Eurocities or global cities?**

The historical economic geography of Europe suggests that the continent developed through the concentration of wealth in a central broad band of old, affluent cities running from Northern Italy, through Switzerland, up through the Rhineland to the cities of the north west (Therborn 1995: 181-93; Dunford 1998; Bagnasco and Le Galès 1997). Cities enjoyed wealth and power through their relative independence from nation states, the local rootedness of their populations, their inclusive welfarist orientation, and their geographical proximity in the building of cross-border ties and networks (Kaelble 1990: 59-74). Brussels, which so often puts itself at the 'heart' of Europe, has clearly benefited from its location and its identity in this sense. One only needs to look at its centrality at the centre of the developing high speed train network to appreciate this elementary point of geography. Yet this stable, territorial arrangement of wealth and power is challenged by the new models of global city networks in the 'information age', which suggest that wealth no longer needs to be accumulated in fixed points centered on established cities and connections. Rather, it can be mobile between very distant points, and hence businesses and people themselves are likely to opt out of local rootedness in cities and regions. (Castells 1993; Taylor and Hoyler 2000; Kotkin 2000). Some, like Castells, argue that European cities' inability to move with the times is leaving its economies stranded in the new age (Castells 1997: 401-403). But it may also be that he is missing the point about the specificity and durability of the older European model (see also Mann 1998; Fligstein and Merand 2001) .



The tension at stake here runs through attempts by cities to struggle against and/or harness globalization by promoting local modes of governance through ‘glocalization’, combining national, regional and local government power with national and international business interests (Swyngedouw 1997; Brenner 1999). At a more human level, the tension also runs through the obvious distinction between settled, accumulation-based models of classic ‘bourgeois’ life, and the economic strategies of the highly mobile (on this, see the ultra-libertarian manifesto of Angell 2000). When city planners try to bolster arguments about location and quality of life in their efforts to attract businesses or retain highly qualified staff, they are in effect trying to square this circle. Brussels, where the Region is highly aware of the implications of these questions on its status as a prosperous business location and ‘emergent’ global city, offers an excellent site for studying these questions at both the structural and human level (see also Baeten 2000).

### **2.iii. Humanizing the sociology and economic geography of globalization**

The economic geography literature, however, has on the whole proceeded apace with scant attention to the human dimension of global city issues. Flows and networks between locations are measured by counting the number of offices corporation have in different cities, measuring foreign direct investment and information exchange, or by quantitatively charting shifts in business from production to service industries (Taylor, Walker and Beaverstock 2000; Castells 1997; Sassen 2000; Esping-Andersen 1999). But rarely is any kind of human face given to these macro-level transactions and data-sets. The ever-growing mobility and migration of professionals is always assumed to be an integral part of these flows (Sassen 2001), but more often than not the mobility of individuals alongside capital, services and goods is simply deduced from the macro-level data. It is rarely asked whether real individuals, with everyday family lives

and human relationships, could actually live out the lives predicted for them by the macro economic data about flows and networks (a partial exception: Beaverstock 2001b). Moreover, the decline of the nation state, signaled and in some cases celebrated by these global theorists, is almost never checked against the basic everyday durability of nationally specific practices and identities in organizing the behavior of people in Europe (Billig 1995).

The sociology of the global fares little better. Global functionalists have taken us beyond the nation state into a postnational world of human rights and transnational politics (Meyer et al 1997; Boli and Ramirez 1997; Soysal 1994). But the macro-focus on policies and institutions has nothing to say about whether this has changed persistent national differences in Europe in the shape of the life-cycle, family life, professional careers, social practices, and so on (on these, see Crouch 1999). Global Marxists have identified a transnational capitalist class running business corporations, flying around the globe, and manipulating international organizations like the EU to their own ends (Sklair 2001, van Apeldoorn 1999).<sup>1</sup> But again, the studies never penetrate further than macro-level political economy, and a general cynicism about elites (an exception: Burawoy et al 2000). Theoretical writers on globalization, meanwhile, have been guilty of a terrible excess here (Bauman 1996; Hannerz 1996, Urry 2000, Papastergiadis 2000; see Favell 2001b). Increased world migration and mobility (a dubious assumption to begin with) has, for these theorists, completely dissolved the stable structures of the nation-state-society. The world according to them is now a compressed ‘postmodern’ time-space continuum of virtual flows and

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<sup>1</sup> Far better empirical studies assessing the emergence of a new European elite in conjunction with European integration – minus the Marxist baggage - have however been done from a political sociology perspective. See the collection in French, edited by Guiraudon (2000), and suggestive work by American scholars Neil Fligstein (1996; 1998) and Sid Tarrow (1995).

networks that link up cities and cultures across the globe, creating new global identities and politics.

But who exactly are the *übermensch* predicated by these theorists?<sup>2</sup> Do these people who populate the niche marketing of in-flight magazines and global hotel chains really exist or live out real lives? What are the human costs and consequences of this lifestyle? What has changed in the everyday shape of their lives beyond the nation state? The only economic literature to recognize this issue in a sensible, humanistic way is the human resources literature on expatriation, which pragmatically puts at its core the management dilemmas of dealing with the personal and family difficulties of dealing with mobility and relocation (Beaverstock 2001a).

This naturally focuses on the problems of following spouses and children, but also the psychology of dealing with foreign culture and the weariness of distant family ties and contacts.

When adding these issues to the obvious difficulties linked to economic accumulation or

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<sup>2</sup> This was a question I first asked myself after picking up a copy of the global yuppie magazine *Wallpaper*\* (\*= “the stuff that surrounds you”) for the first time in May 2000 – appropriate enough at that high temple of European modernity, Frankfurt airport. Although this was undoubtedly the best looking, most entertaining, most intelligent in-flight magazine I had ever read, I found it hard to believe that there really exists a ‘demographic niche’ for this (now) wildly successful magazine. An archly ironic feature on the demise of the nation state summarized the attitude of the magazine perfectly: “The nation state is *so* 20<sup>th</sup> century. A rising regionalism around the world is dissolving old national borders. The global city-region, cross-border region, and super region (presumably they mean the EU?) is the new parlance of a borderless world of swashbuckling businessmen, high speed commuters and jetsetting teenagers... (but) We must not ring the death knell of the nation state just yet. We will still suffer custom guards pawing through our Vuitton bags after over-enthusiastic impulse splurges in duty-free airports. But if a borderless world is truly in the making, then the tool of choice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century cartographer won’t be the pencil but the eraser. *Wallpaper*\* patiently awaits the new World Atlas *sans frontières*” (‘The New World Order’, *Wallpaper* April 2000: 59-64). Or again, in a feature rating their favourite commuter helicopters and private jets in the way *What Car?* rates automobiles, they rate their favorite airport landing: “If you want a truly multimedia experience, few things beat flying back into London City Airport at tea-time Friday on the Crossair shuttle from Geneva. For the well connected media tart, the final nerve wracking plunge past the glass-and-steel towers of Canary Wharf offers the perfect opportunity to wave at half the commissioning editors in Britain... If only they’d let us switch on our mobile phones we’d be able to hear what their cute little faces were mouthing back...” (‘Top 25’, *Wallpaper* May 2000). The magazine is edited in London by a Swede called Tyler Brûlé (sic), and a “UN-like” editorial team of global free movers. The somewhat queasy feeling all this irony leads to can be linked to darker undercurrents. A Swedish academic living in London pointed out to me how the aesthetic of *Wallpaper* – which is full of glistening Aryan models in après ski wear, and modernist dreamworlds built of perfect kitchens, exotic holidays and soaring

building a career beyond the national, it is amazing that globalization theorists have been able to get away with their sweeping generalizations about the effortless mobility of highly educated professional ‘elites’. The Europe of free movement may offer a more realistic version of possible transnational opportunities beyond the nation-state-society, but this is at best an unstudied empirical question that demands something more than wild theoretical speculation. Exceptions to this lack of research can, however, be found in French, in the interesting work of Tarrius (1992; 2000) and Wagner (1998).

This, then, is a further goal for this study: a genuine empirical study about the lives of the prototypical European ‘fourmis’, the still anonymous and faceless heroes of the transnational global theorists. Going beyond human resources management questions, I seek to map out in intimate detail how living abroad has made alterations to career structures and everyday life that would not have occurred had they stayed back home. Clearly there are costs as well as benefits to stepping out from regular patterns of professional advancement; to leaving behind regular forms of family life rooted in locality and national culture; or opting out from the cradle of national welfare states, dedicated increasingly to protect only their own citizens from the effects of the global economy. The one instance of a study that focuses on the human consequences of the new economy in a similar way is Richard Sennett’s (1998) extraordinary study of the impact of the post-industrial era on the lives of professional Americans, *The Corrosion of Character*. But are these rootless and vulnerable euro-lives as difficult and potentially tragic as his work might suggest? This study aims to find out.

#### **2.iv. Comparing the integration of ‘ethnic’ and ‘elite’ migrants**

A very different literature, however, has paid a great deal of attention to the fine-grained, intimate ‘moving stories’ of migrants (Thomson 1999; King 1997, King 1998). The field in question is migration studies. This literature has also been effective in revealing the way the divergent backgrounds and experiences of migrants reveal the persistent national structures and cultures of settled populations (Favell 1998). Following the life experiences of migrants is, in fact, one of the best ways of gaining a perspective on the sedentary lifestyles of the vast majority of people who do not move internationally. The study of ‘elite’ or professional international migration is, however, peripheral to the main questions of migration studies (see, however, King et al 2000; Salt 1992; Gaillard/Gaillard 1998). This field in Europe has been dominated by the study of working class, ‘ethnic’, non-European migrants: post-colonial, guest worker and refugee migration, and the typical models of migration, settlement and integration that follow from this. Behind most ideas of what happens to these migrants as they integrate into European countries, is a model that owes much to the example of the USA and Canada, as the prototypical ideal of countries of immigration (see Favell 2001).

The one-way narrative from immigration to (assimilated) citizenship that anchors this model has been challenged in recent years by the anthropology and sociology of transnational migrants. Transnational migrants, whose lives are often located neither fully in their new country of residence nor back home where they came from, are often pointed to as the new heroes of a ‘globalization from below’ (Portes 1996; Glick Schiller et al 1995). The emphasis in this field on their economic and cultural networks, the flow of business transactions and remittances, and their political and social influence on events back home, has also opened the door to a new

perception of such 'ethnic' migrants as educated and influential 'elites' and 'pioneers' (Portes 1999). One limitation is that transnational approaches notoriously have a hard time with the classic question of assimilation and integration (Alba/Nee 1997). While tracking global or cross-national networks, it is essential to recognize the simultaneous processes of settlement and accommodation taking place as migrants continue to encounter the older style pressures to integrate in their new national place of residence. Sometimes the tensions surrounding the uncertain place of transnational migrants has led to the sort of outcomes - like ghetto formation, defensive ethnic identity formation and socially downward assimilation - that would have been noted in the past for more classic 'ethnic' immigrants (Portes/Zhou 1992).

But can the heroic tales of Asian astronauts or Hispanic diasporas offer a directly transposable guide to the mobility of Europeans within the EU? There may indeed be something to learn from applying this rich and developed literature to the case of professional European migrants within the EU. The creative tension between the transformative impact of transnational networks and identities, and older, more predictable processes of integration/accommodation might, in theory, no less apply to professional migrants moving from Germany to the Netherlands, or Portugal to Belgium. This, at least, is an open question posed by applying the typical framework of migration theories to questions concerning the integration and participation of European migrants in, say, Brussels or other international eurocities. Here, too, are cities with ample other forms of migration and ethnic relations with which to compare and contrast. Applying a migration studies problematic to professional European migrants in European cities leads to typical integration questions: measuring their participation as economic and political actors in the city, their social impact on the host country, questions of 'ethnic' identity or ghetto formation,

their degree of socialization into local national culture(s), the persistence of ties and activities elsewhere, and so on.

Plausible as this kind of approach may be, it remains an open question to what extent applying such theories can be applied to the predominantly white, middle class European professional 'class'. Global cities theories in fact are premised on identifying a sharp 'polarization' between the new immigrant 'ethnic' underclasses who fill service industry opportunities in these cities, and the emergent 'global' elites in the financial, media and service businesses at the other end of the social scale (Sassen 2001). Although international in origin, these privileged, educated elites are assumed to face none of the barriers and discriminations felt by poorer immigrants; nor are they ever thought to be subject to the same coercive integratory pressures that 'ethnic' migrants might face from their host nations. It is assumed that elite migrants are free to exploit the opportunities of their transnational lifestyles and mobility with few of the obvious costs that other, less privileged migrants face. Yet all of these assumptions – including whether they are in fact 'elites' - need checking by tracing the actual migration origins, patterns and stories of the new kind of European 'transnational pioneer'.

## **2.v. The impact of foreigners on gentrification and change in cities**

Urban geography has experienced a renaissance in recent years, charting among other things the interlinked dynamics of change in post-industrial cities alongside the gentrification of residential pockets within the inner city. Studies have focused on how a young set of middle class urban pioneers have sought cultural diversity and new urban lifestyles in inner city areas abandoned by a previous generation during suburbanization. This has led on to new forms of political activism

and a dramatic cultural transformation of certain cities (Ley 1996). Brussels offers a particularly sharp scenario of this kind, in that this is a city that faced both dramatic large-scale suburbanization and steep industrial decline in past decades (Kesteloot 2000). Poorer immigrants here, like in the US and Canada, have played a major role in re-habilitating abandoned parts of the city with commerce and street life. Middle class urban pioneers have followed them back into the central city. What is interesting for the present study is the not inconsiderable role of foreign European residents in leading the gentrification process in certain neighborhoods of Brussels (van Criekingen 1997). Moreover, this has led to a somewhat different kind of multicultural interaction, leading to new types of housing and commercial development, and new forms of culture in certain parts of the city. The study of housing patterns can indeed be a proxy for the study other social and political processes. It is for this reason one of the central empirical foci of this study (see Bourdieu 2000). No other city in Europe has quite seen, as Brussels has, the emergence of distinctly European neighborhoods within the multicultural mosaic typical of international cities. This new social geography - which combines the features of an ethnic enclave and a gentrifying middle class - offers a rich new field of study. One may also consider the potential comparisons to be drawn between Ixelles or Sint Kathelijne in Brussels and de Pijp or Jordaan in Amsterdam, Shoreditch or Islington in London, and Bastille or Oberkampf in Paris, sites where similar dynamics could be observed in the last decade or so.

## **2.vi. The emergence of multicultural spaces in national societies**

The emergence of such multinational enclaves within multicultural cities leads to consideration of the nature of these new Euro-enclaves within the nationalized space of the society around them, particular the freedom and empowerment it may furnish those able to step outside the



caging power structures of the nation-state. Again, taking its cue from the impact of non-European 'ethnic' migrants in western cities, certain writers have sought to identify transnationalism with specific locations that emerge within cities (Keith/Pile 1993; Massey 1994; M.P.Smith 2001). These transnational spaces represent the nodes of cross-national networks, linking together cultural, economic and political activities in the city with the diasporas and transnational communities around the world. They suggest the possibility of cross-national 'inter-stitial' social power (Mann 1993), that draws on the ability of free movers to benefit from and identify with the space created by their non-national 'anomie', their 'not-belonging' to any one nation or the other. Do the new Euro-spaces function in such a way? Or are Euro-movers just a milder, modern day version of Arendt's statelessness, stranded outside the national structures that make social and political struggles meaningful? The question can be specified further by looking at to what extent the new kinds of commercial and cultural activities that take place here – often in the form of shops, clubs, pubs and restaurants – represent a similar transnational challenge to the overwhelmingly nationalized activities of European cities. Are they creating specifically 'Euro' spaces, or are they just a European version of the generic global market? In Brussels, as I have noted, there is the extraordinary confluence of multinational, multicultural and multileveled influences, that perhaps generate even more space or opportunity for the presence of the transnational in the city.

## **2.vii. Is there such a thing as European citizenship?**

A great deal of academic effort has been spent in the last decade in specifying the counterfactual conditions for the development of a 'true' European citizenship. This is taken almost unanimously to be the core normative requirement for the emergence of a European democracy,

and European public voice worthy of the EU integration project (Weiler 1998; Wiener 1997; Meehan 1993). The EU has led the way with numerous attempts to bring itself close to the public, and encourage a sense of European citizenship among apathetic national voters. Foreign European EU citizens have the rights to vote in local elections across the EU – which in Brussels means the highly localized, but important, Commune level elections every six years. Uniquely among European cities, the high percentage of European residents, coupled with their concentration in certain communes, in fact creates the possibility of a serious electoral impact of this population on Belgian politics as a whole (Bousetta and Swyngedouw 1999). Brussels thus offers a natural setting for exploring the reality of European citizenship. Do foreign residents vote, hold opinions, or participate in any way in the Belgian political system around them? After all, this is a highly euro-conscious population, many of whom work in some contact with the European institutions. If there is no real sense of emerging European citizenship here, then where in Europe could there be (see also the work of Strudel 1999)?

## **2.viii. Assessing the Europeanization of Europeans**

Finally, there is the related but much wider issue of the emergence of genuinely Europeanized behavior, beyond the national customs, identities, practices that European nationals have inherited from their nation-states of origin. Most of the anthropological literature on Europeanization suggests in fact limited evidence of Europeanization in this sense (see Borneman/Fowler 1997). It appears limited to sport (European football leagues and the free movement of players), to tourism, to the Europeanization of restaurant cuisine styles, to certain cross-border activities in some regions. Brussels again can be thought of as a privileged site of research into this question, given the high European population and the *prima facie* likelihood

that residents here will be living a more Europeanized life than others. This is a premise that should by no means be limited to eurocrats (as in, for example, Shore 2000, Abélès 1996). For reasons to do with the structure of their careers, *fonctionnaires* will only represent a certain limited form of Europeanization in their behavior. Beyond the rhetoric, is a Europe of Europeans really being built? And again, there is that feeling: if this is not happening in Brussels, then where?

It is my hope that a Brussels-based investigation can offer a way of addressing all eight of these wider issues.

### **3.i. Pioneers of professional free movement in Europe**

The use of oral history techniques, and an oblique sampling procedure, led to findings that revealed unusual life stories and pioneer trajectories very different to the kind of heavily structured migrations predicted by the literature on ‘elite’ professional migration and multinational corporations. Such an approach puts the emphasis back on explaining migration – and, in this study, settlement - as the decision of individuals, in which very ‘thick’, personalized factors are crucial to our understanding. It also takes us a million miles from the over-used, lazy academic metaphors about ‘flows’, ‘connectivities’ and ‘networks’ that dominate all the global studies talk about migration and mobility.

As my discussion has stressed throughout, it is also a lazy generalization to describe these ‘free movers’ as ‘elites’. This is not the ‘transnational capitalist class’; they are not the glossy characters pictured in the IT, banking, airline and mobile telephone adverts in *Fortune 500* or

*The Economist* magazines. Their general social origins and careers of these people locates them as fairly average middle class professionals, who are often high achievers from modest backgrounds. Although these eurostars are, in an important sense, the rare-to-find heroes of the Europeanization of European society, they are not the future power brokers and decision makers of the continent, pictured in naïve image of European *stagiare* parties and Eurocrat socializing.<sup>3</sup> These ‘elites’ are still much more likely to emerge through conventional national channels, in which national social class origins and networks will remain crucial (Bourdieu 1979; 1989). The people I speak with did not end up in Brussels through following some mainstream fast-track in their nation state of origin. On the contrary, they came to Brussels for idiosyncratic reasons: sometimes as a somewhat marginal ‘alternative’ to a career path via in the national capital (typical of the French or British); sometimes because of a international idealism (very typical of Germans, Dutch, Scandinavians); sometimes for adventure and change (a number of respondents ‘gave up’ careers already established at home, choosing wisdom and experience over tougher more frenetic careers there); sometimes (as with the Irish and the Southern Europeans) because Brussels has now become an established path to social and professional mobility. The opportunities are there in Brussels, but the settlement process is often accidental; none would have predicted the dour initial idea they had of Brussels would metamorphosize into such a positive long term identification with the city. Yet very few expressed any regrets with their life-

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the popular US news magazine *Time* ran two big features on the new ‘eurostars’ and the new Europe in 2000/2001, ‘Fast Forward Europe’ (Winter Special 2000/2001) and ‘Generation Europe: What today’s young think about life, love, technology – and being European’ (April 2, 2001). Some Americans are perhaps waking up to the fact that there is an internationalization process going on in Europe that is not yet another generic form of Americanization/globalization, but something rather different and opposed to American cultural hegemony. The latter article appropriately enough begins its story at a multinational *stagiare* party: “Young and restless adults are reinventing the Continent’s identity – and their own... they’re young, they’re cosmopolitan and they don’t have much use for the borders that have divided Europe for centuries. Inside the mind of the Continent’s rising generation’.

choices (though it must be said this is often the case in interviews-based migration research; see King et al 2000).

The isolation of their ‘weird’ decision to live and work abroad, in fact perhaps accounts for much of the reluctance of their peer groups back home to move around Europe. This is clear when considering the British, for example, in Brussels – who are, without exception, self-styled exceptions to the dominant Euro-skepticism that prevails back home. When Rob and Rachel put all their belongings in a car in northern England, and embarked on a new life in Brussels, it was seen by friends as a dramatic move. It is, of course, a move much less familiar than the idea of Australia or North America, despite the ease and distance involved in going to Brussels. They moved because they felt they could coordinate careers in Brussels, be close to home, but also keep alive an international dimension to their lives that would fast disappear in England (they had studied languages at university, almost a *sine qua non*, for British eurostars). Although, on all these issues, this makes Brussels a more rational destination than traveling half the world in search a better life, their choice remains an exception. Very few other British people would move to Belgium as a couple; nearly all came originally as single people. There is clearly a contrast to be drawn here with the fairly typical Irish story, reported above, in which Tom and Sinead coordinated their careers and migration choice through the well-developed Irish network, that has turned Brussels (as well as Paris and Amsterdam) into more desirable destinations than London, and other English-language destinations further afield. John and Ellen, another English couple, did indeed come as a couple. But again, their story was one of making an exceptional decision in favor of adventure and ‘something different’ in their 30s after establishing careers at home.

The German, Dutch, Scandinavian and French people I spoke with all narrated the move to Brussels as an exceptional decision, cutting themselves off from their national peer groups, and the kind of standard career laid out for them during university at home. In some cases their commitment followed some experience of travel as students, but there was also a sense of frustration and boredom with the kind of national options they faced that propelled them abroad. Only among the Southern Europeans did I find ‘purer’ examples of eurostars ‘rationally’ following a clear international option within the EU of free movement to leave home for professional reasons. Natalia, a social worker, Pedro, a research scientist, Maria and Miguel, a lobbyist and IT specialist respectively, had all followed the straightforward path through student opportunities to an international career. So, interestingly, had Saïd, from France, an exceptional case in both national and ‘ethnic’ terms (it is very rare to find European nationals of ethnic minority origin who have been willing and able to free move abroad – for the simple enough reason that it is hard enough already trying to ‘integrate’ at home). Natalia and Gianni, a very successful architect, had explicitly moved because their professional opportunities were limited or blocked at home. Ambition and cultural openness had led them to establishing very strong roots in Brussels, and remarkable, international *and* Belgian social networks. They had also carved out impressive careers in professions that are a very tight at the national level. Pedro and Miguel expressed much more indifferent attitudes to Brussels, that would be more typical of the rootless international free mover, weighing up future international possibilities within professions (high tech science, and IT) that are very internationalized in their structure. These characters are much closer to the ideal type of free movers predicated by the EU free movement policies and self-help literature. It should be expected that rising numbers of young Southern

Europeans will move to the north for these reasons. Yet the experiences of another Italian, Caterina, who also worked in (medical) scientific research, underlines that these heroes of free movement also feel the weight of being away from home. Caterina, who is from a rich northern city in Italy, recognized how peculiar how life was compared to friends back, whom she visits once a year. Single and independent, she had comfortably adjusted to the benefits of a very different international life in Ixelles, that was not in any way comprehensible to her peers back home. It should be noted that all my respondents from Southern Europe were originally from fairly well-off middle class backgrounds and affluent cities: it is not a migration particularly centered on provincial or less advantaged people, in distinction to the provincial origins of most British or French.

The transition from sojourner to settler obviously too plays a substantial role in limiting the numbers of intra-European migrants. Even with open professional opportunities, high relative quality of life and no great sense of real discrimination or exclusion, the taste of life abroad can easily fail to convert into a longer term stay. Some, for sure, are likely to be peripatetic movers for many years. Janet, who worked for a multinational, had been recruited into their expat career structure, having begun as a free moving journalist in Brussels. This had led her to embrace the ideology of the firm that foresees regular international redeploying for that sub-sector of the company designated as international high-flyers. She had correspondingly adjusted her view on Brussels: as one of enjoyable indifference. No commitment was foreseen. Although she herself was a 'free mover', the career movements of most expats are for this reason not a good indicator of 'free movement' potential within Europe – where the multinationals, not the migrants, are making the decisions about the destinations involved. However, other anecdotal evidence

suggests that ‘personal’ factors – such as relationships, family connections, or cultural attraction – does play a factor in the increasing with of multinational employees to exercise some degree of control and choice over their international careers. Working for Shell or Unilever should not be like being deployed wherever they tell you to go, like a soldier in the army.

Other sojourners do develop strong attachments to the place, while recognizing future moves are likely. Even eventual settlers often have strong assumptions about the temporariness of the stay; even if the slow *engrenage* of building a life in the city – getting used to neighborhoods, buying household items, looking for new flats – indicates a rather different kind of experience. Others who may prove to be sojourners nevertheless experience the period as an indefinite period, with perhaps a three or five year plan in mind. It is very difficult to live anywhere effectively without at least settling to this degree. With the exception of interviewees such as Janet and Pedro, life in Brussels was not seen as a prelude to a ‘global’ move (wherever opportunity takes you). For most, the attraction of settling and committing to Brussels was real – although many recognized the well-known ‘five year’ make-or-break barrier. The permanent decision – well described by Amy and Stephen’s ‘big’ decision described above – is also one that makes a big qualitative difference to life in the city. Suddenly, the casual social networks that come so easily to new arrivers in the city become, as they had for Natalia, Caterina, Gianni and others, a constitutive part of one’s well-being in the city. It should be noted that meeting people in Brussels is remarkably easy: Irish pubs, salsa bars and endless house party invitations function to knit together people who in another big city could expect to endure initial periods of isolation.



So much of what is enabled by the Brussels context is exceptional by European standards. Nowhere else in Europe is there a city where you can actually point out European residential neighborhoods on a map! Other bigger, faster, tougher cities make it much harder for expats to socialize outside of their own national group, outside the corporate life, or outside the ghettos of international organizations. Very few other cities are so forgiving of indifference to the nation state around it, while so open to cultural diversity. Very few European cities are so easy on a practical level (in terms of finding housing, social networks, setting up an everyday life), or have such a vast range of expat services. Without these conditions, we can scarcely expect free movement to develop dramatically in Europe – these are features much more familiar to major American cities. Yet building that everyday life in the long term – living the trans-national, or a-national way - is hard enough even in Brussels. Even eurostars remain pioneers, oddities within the European nation-state-society system.

### **3.ii. The elusive European dream: transnational mobility and bourgeois settlement**

Is the international dimension of a European city such as Brussels just a generic aspect of its emergent ‘global city’ properties? Answering this through my data of course takes the work in a different qualitative direction that the typical kinds of economic geography measuring such things through business flows and transactions. The crucial question must be whether the lifestyles of European free movers in any way are to combine the benefits of located ‘bourgeois’ accumulation as settlement and commitment, and the ‘nouveau’ wealth of ever-moving global capital. Both types, in any case, have been historically dominated by national elites. The most ambitious and successful of the free movers may, indeed, exemplify the ‘nouveau’ path to mobility, but even the most enthusiastic of international career builder generally recognizes that

they have given up entitlements to the benefits of a nationally rooted lifestyle along the way. Brussels, however, offers a different kind of opportunity, far closer to the European free movement ideal: that stable, rooted, essentially would-be ‘bourgeois’ middle class professionals, might yet achieve more than they would have at home by moving and settling in a different European city, without giving up on the precious, settled European ‘quality of life’ that comes from ‘belonging’ somewhere. This is, of course, a move that many Americans make several times during their careers around the North American continent, without a great deal of hesitation or sentimentality about where ‘they come from’.

Many of the people I spoke with were just free movers of the rootless kind: career opportunities might prevail over the benefits of settled life in Brussels, where they still felt little access to the ‘place’ as it would be experienced by Belgians. For those in IT (Miguel), science (Pedro), working for multinationals (Janet), Brussels indeed is merely an instance of the ‘global’ – an interchangeable city of structural opportunities created by its place in the global capitalist ‘system’. Their experience of the city was linked to this. Others, obviously, linked the dynamic of their careers with Brussels in a specific way – because the work had intimate connections with the international and European organizations in the city. Those most invested in the city, however, were those whose domestic and cultural lifestyles, as well as their careers, were enabled in some way *by* the city, and *this* city specifically. A majority of the eurostars fall into this category, which suggests something very different from the global city idea of ‘interchangeable’ cities with similar structural career opportunities and indifference to the choice of location.

It is in this sense, that the idea of a truly eurocity might emerge. Residents who have invested in a city because of its combination of career and lifestyle opportunities, have also done so because they see they can have access to the kind of life they want *there* and not elsewhere – that moving further will only reduce or destroy this possibility. This in turn will call for commitment, investment and identification with this specific *place*. National residents of eurocities have often long recognized this themselves: that building the life they want in these competitive, desirable cities, alongside the career and wealth accumulation they desire, requires a long term investment in the city as place, sometimes strategizing over the long run to obtain the right kind of housing, location for children, access to local benefits, and so on. All this, in turn, depends on a high degree of identification with the place. The wealth of European cities has historically been linked to this sense of local, regional investment in place: building ‘bourgeois’ rootedness and accumulation, alongside the ability to be open to business networks, transactions and travel with other places. Property ownership, obviously, is the most visible aspect of this. But equally important is the sense that any activity will be enhanced by its specific location and involvement in the city where it is located.

How might this work for eurostars as a new form of European bourgeoisie, who have moved to build careers, yet also seek a stable sense of settlement and investment in a specific place? For some, it is a question of Brussels as a uniquely accessible ‘third city’ for couples who would find it difficult to settle in any one of their national countries of origin. Andreas, a Norwegian with an Italian wife, expressed very clearly his sense that Brussels enabled a negotiation of his family life to suited them well, despite the distance from home. Correspondingly, they had sought out a way of settling in the city that could lead to a much longer term stay there than could be expected

from the 'objective' attractions of the city. The active choice of moving into a 'European' neighborhood in Ixelles was part of this, as it had been for Caterina, Janet, Tom and Sinead, and others. Settlement in Brussels as a third city had led Dutch political activist, Rik Jellema, towards his deep political investment in the city: his French wife and he had found that the city enabled their family with children to evolve as if the city were their original home.

Brussels, then, in some ways may offer the combination of conditions – an accessible local quality of life, together with multi-national openness – that enable original and dynamic careers, alongside attractive and settled lifestyles. Gunther, the German consultant was a good example: using his expertise of travel and international perspectives in his work in marketing for German companies, shuttling back and forth for work between Munich and Brussels, while enjoying a very high quality of family life in Brussels. He had built new business opportunities, and a successful Brussels lifestyle, out of an initial settlement that his followed his wife's more typical Brussels-type work in an international organization (in this case the EU). Others who had made successful businesses out of life and work in Brussels – such as Dave, the businessmen, or Gianni the architect - had combined successfully the business edge often possessed by foreigners in a new environment, with a specific personal adaptation and investment in the kind of lifestyle that the place afforded.

One of the factors that makes Brussels a viable eurocity – with its own distinctive features that lead to original and productive economic and political activities – is the ease of sociability in the city. Its size, the abundance of localities, the concentration of other Europeans, all held enable European residents conversant with the place to build opportunities specific to the location on

top of any that might have simply followed from the move abroad or the 'global city' location. A popular evening gathering place like 'The Bank', a slightly up-market Irish pub in the 'yuppie' neighborhood of Châtelain in Ixelles, on one level offers a 'local' for residents wishing to meet and relax with other foreign Europeans. But, as with other similar locations in the city, it also functions as a site for building networks out of sociability: it is a place where a good deal of the freelance lobbying and professional information is circulated, as well as knowledge about job openings and new careers.

For sure, there is a tension here tension between mobility opportunities and accumulation through settlement, investment and identification, which runs through most, if not all, the free moving lifestyles I have encountered. Brussels is perhaps unique in offering a sense to many that they can settle and build something here as a eurocity, while also capitalizing on the mobility opportunities they found by leaving behind 'home', and the 'open', 'global' or 'cosmopolitan' dimensions of this city. For many years, though, this sense of settlement and commitment can be a fragile one, seen still in a temporary light. But many do appreciate the benefits of achieving some degree of rootedness. Though many of them are single, or have no children, and some clearly are likely to move again, there are very few examples of the 'pure' rootless free mover envisaged in the flows and networks of global city scholars.

Yet for all the growing possibilities of combining mobility with settlement, successful long term investment and settlement is still hampered by other factors. The ideal of European free movement, in Brussels as elsewhere, will always be hampered by a lingering sense of dislocation from the normal patterns of social and family life that international mobility seems to involve.

Free movers, despite being fairly average middle class professional people, find themselves living a lifestyle that their families and peer groups back home no longer understand; and they find that many of the lifestyle choices they make in the new city are also very different to those of 'indigenous' nationals around them. As I have shown, this leads to the conscious adoption of lifestyles that lie outside the normal settled 'family' lifestyles that might be expected – with a high number of single or childless lifestyles – even though sustaining a relationship or having children in Brussels as a foreigner is not hugely different or more difficult than for a national.

The sense that they have 'opted out' of something will also affects their long term security over the lives they have chosen. All investment and settlement requires some longer term security of some kind. It is a crucial fact about free movement in Europe that those that move internationally are often punished severely by the national welfare states which they are seen to have abandoned. This factor does not weigh in the free mobility of persons in North America, where welfare in any case has to be personalized and portable, and public provision is negligible.

Middle class professionals in Europe, though, are the very core of national welfare states: they are the people that pay for it, and usually those that most benefit it. They are also the class that most often proves most decisive in political elections. Free movers opt out of this game, and hence sometimes out of its dividends. Though the longer term costs are not something that emerge as a conscious reason for them to doubt their initial move – which invariably was made to improve income and career opportunities, as well as to open up international experience – they are perhaps factors which weigh subconsciously on other average middle class people who perhaps lack the same sense of adventure, or who have opted at an earlier age to settle and accumulate. Free movers encounter these costs later: in concerns over retirement and the fact that

no real pan-national structures ultimately exist to guarantee their ‘social security’. Free movers learn over time that they are, in this sense at least, left to their own resources. It is perhaps this in the end that causes that sense of separation from the kind of ‘national’ lives within national welfare state that they have left behind. People who perhaps never saw themselves as doing anything particularly remarkable, start to live more precarious, genuinely extraordinary, pioneer lives.

## **6. Conclusion: Eurostars and Eurocities**

One of the most visible manifestations of Europeanization has been the success of the Thalys and Eurostar train links that now speed regularly between Paris, London, Amsterdam and Brussels. Part of a developing trans-European network (TEN) of high speed rail links sponsored by the European Union, the passengers of these trains perhaps offer another distinctive sample of the highly visible, yet still mysteriously unknown individuals on which this study is focused: the ‘eurostars’ at the vanguard of European free movement. Adapting my marketing niche research strategy, we might find that their lifestyles, consumer profile and cosmopolitan attitudes can be read off from the editorial content and advertisements found in the glossy on-board magazines. Their carefully targeted marketing effort is, in other words, pitched at what they see as an emergent future population of ultra-mobile cross-national professionals and upper bracket tourists that ride these fast trains. The multi-lingual text and the polyglot cultural references reflect the emergent ease of cross-national exchange and travel in this highly interlinked part of North West Europe. Yet the emergent European culture reflected in these pages also remains anchored in the national specificities of the four capitals, in which each city markets itself as the

distinct embodiment of national treasures and cultural excellence, alongside proud invocations of their international openness and diversity.

Even at its most cosmopolitan, then, Europe remains an imagined landscape of national cities, national cultures, and national differences. The resilient, even thriving distinctiveness of European national cultures has been overlooked and downplayed by a generation of ‘globalization’ scholars concerned with impersonal macro-level structural changes in the economy and international political system that are said to signal the inexorable decline of the nation state in Europe and elsewhere. The vast and growing literature on ‘global cities’ points towards the major cities of Europe as the very locus of this process. Yet these national capitals remain the essence and embodiment of the distinct national cultures in which they are centered, even as they also embody a far wider range of internationalized and Europeanized cultures than their still solidly nationalized hinterlands.

This study is part of a wider investigation into the human dimension of globalization and Europeanization. It sets out to see to what extent foreign European residents of major European cities still experience barriers in their access to social and economic participation in everyday aspects of life in the city, such as the housing market, education, welfare institutions, consumer services and political representation. Just as the street names, neighborhood identities and architectural features of capital cities embody an implicit, sedimented ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig 1995; Latour/Hermant 1998) that is imprinted into the very structure of the city – a coded social history which only fully socialized nationals of the country are ever likely to understand – these other everyday structures may be organized and structured in ways that perpetuate nationalized



forms of ‘know-how’ that create a ‘natural’ national monopoly on access to the ‘quality of life’ benefits of life there. These informal barriers reflect what can be thought of in terms of the heavily nationalized ‘structure of everyday life’ (echoing de Certeau 1990, and Braudel 1992) that I suspect lies at the heart of the distinctiveness and resilience of European national cultures.

Brussels is one European capital that appears to offer some of the most open conditions and opportunities for foreign European residents to access the highly sought after benefits of a high ‘quality of life’ that remains the primary object of political and social struggle of urban dwelling professionals. My study has offered indicative, if inconclusive, evidence of both its open and closed dimensions. Although much can be said that is negative about Brussels, its relative accessibility only really comes to light when the city is considered in comparative perspective. Much further study of comparable places, such as Amsterdam, London and Paris, will be needed to substantiate this, but it does seem clear that the peculiarly non-nationalized situation of Brussels – between national cultures in a federal state – has given it certain dimensions of openness that is not necessarily to be found in these other cities, that are habitually seen as better or more obvious examples of truly internationalized cities.

The limited cross-national mobility of professionals in Europe suggests that the dominantly national organization of access to ‘quality of life’ benefits might still constitute the major barrier to sustained intra-European migration, despite the growing economic and cultural opportunities of such movement. Capital cities offer the most open opportunities, but they are also the sites of the most intense competition over resources and territory. For reasons to do with its location, its complex cultural character, and its extraordinarily open housing market - as well as the sheer

number of foreign European residents in the city - Brussels is perhaps the European capital that has been most physically marked, and internally transformed, by the free movement of Europeans. However, as we have seen, the experience of these pioneers even here remains somewhat marginal to the life of the city, as well as largely misunderstood by the host population. The principle of free movement of persons, and the systematic breaking down of national barriers to economic migration and re-settlement across borders in Europe, remains one of the core achievements on paper of the European Union. Yet the difficulties of fulfilling this kind of lifestyle, and the slight number of individuals willing to embark on a new and complicated cross-national life, point towards how fragile the European dream remains in this continent of still heavily nationalized nation states.

## Appendix

### Figures for resident foreign populations (stocks) in Europe

EU citizens in the foreign population of the 15 member states

% Share of EU Citizen (approx absolute figures)

	in total foreign population	in total population
Austria	12.6	1.1
Belgium	57.0	4.7
Denmark	28.2	0.8
Finland	22.4	0.2
France	33.8	2.0
Germany	26.5	2.3
Greece	13.7	0.2
Ireland	75.2	2.0
Italy	21.3	0.1
Luxembourg	90.5	30.0
Netherlands	28.7	1.4
Portugal	53.7	0.3
Spain	41.2	0.3
Sweden	42.4	2.1
United Kingdom	40.4	1.4

(source: OECD-SOPEMI 2000)

### Approx population figures of foreign EU residents (total population)

EU 15            5 500 000 (374 000 000) = 1.5%

Belgium        562 100 (10 200 000)  
Netherlands    190 200 (15 700 000)  
UK              857 000 (59 000 000)  
Germany       1 850 000 (82 000 000)  
Denmark        48 900 (5 300 000)

(source: SOPEMI 1999)

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